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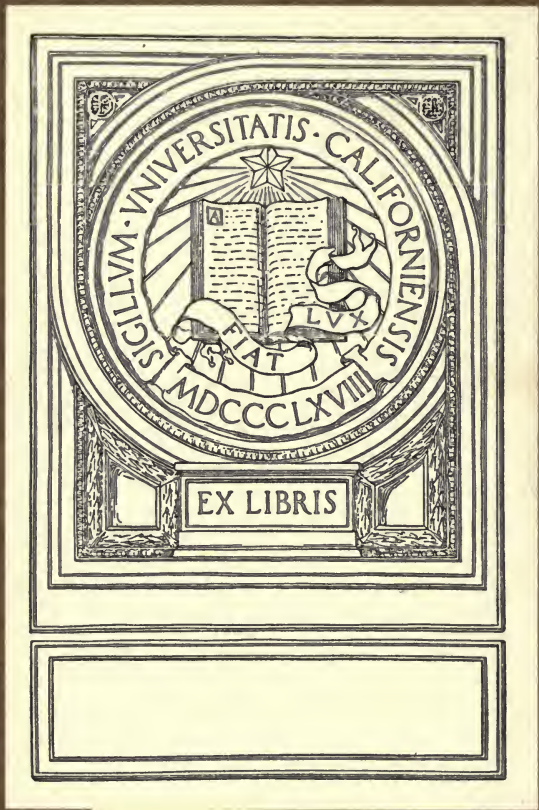
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## Two Indian Reformers.

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A YEAR AGO in this room Mr. Robson was kind enough to read for me a paper on Hinduism and early Christianity. In it, I endeavoured to show how at a very early date the Nestorians had migrated to the East, and how Christianity,—in a corrupt form, it is true,—had ever since existed as a definite religion in Southern India. I further pointed out that Hinduism had borrowed many new ideas from this corrupt Christianity, more especially that of *bhakti*, or an adoring faith directed to a deity who had once been incarnate and who still loved his worshippers. This had spread thence all over India, and had formed the basis of the modern Hindu religious systems. I propose to devote this paper to two Indian Reformers, Kabîr and Tulasi Dâsa, who were the greatest preachers of this *bhakti* in Northern India.

It will be necessary to recapitulate briefly part of what I said on the last occasion. The doctrine of *bhakti* required an incarnate personal god, and the Hindus, who borrowed the idea from Christianity but not the Deity to whom faith was directed, utilized for this purpose two of the incarnations of Vishnu, Râma and Krishna. There thus arose two great sects of *bhakti* followers, each one primarily devoted to one or other of these two gods. To-day we have nothing to do with the Krishna sect. Both Kabîr and Tulasi Dâsa were devoted worshippers of Râma. This Râma (his full name was Râma Chandra) was originally a deified hero, and worship had been directed to him for centuries before the general adoption of the idea of *bhakti* in India. The old story goes that there was a terrible ten-headed demon oppressing the world named Râvana. Natives say that his home was in Ceylon and that by



dint of performing terrible austerities he became all-powerful, not even the gods being able to withstand him. As, however, in his pride, he had taken no precautions to render himself secure against man, he remained vulnerable from that quarter, provided a mortal could be found who was capable of coping with him. At the request of the gods, Vishnu consented to become incarnate as Râma, the eldest son of Dasharatha, King of Oudh. By a palace intrigue he is banished from the court, and lives as an outcast with his wife Sîta, and his faithful brother Lakshmana in the forests of Central India. Râvana finds Sîta and carries her off in Râma's absence. Râma, with the aid of the forest tribes, fancifully depicted as monkeys, of whom the well-known Hanumân was the chief, invaded Ceylon, attacked and burnt Lanka, Râvana's capital, and slew the demon. By this time the term of his banishment had expired, and he returned to Oudh, where he ascended the throne, reigned gloriously, and died in the ordinary course of nature. This is the end of the old pre-*bhakti* story. On Râma's death Vishnu ceased to be incarnate, becoming again the same nebulous deity that he had been previously and remaining so till the occasion of his next incarnation. Râma was worshipped as an incarnation of Vishnu. His exploits were recorded by a great writer in the well-known Sanskrit poem, the Râmâyana, and men looked back to his life on earth as an event in past history,—over and done with,—for which they could show gratitude, but which did not pretend to offer hope for the future.

In the course of time, learned Hindus became acquainted with Nestorian Christianity in the south of India, and about the middle of the 12th century, when England was ruled over by Plantagenets, one of them, Râmânûja, by name, took up the theory of *bhakti*, directed it to Râma, and founded a sect which still bears his name. The fashionable creed of learned men in those days was known as Vedântism, and was a kind of philosophic Pantheism. Its text books were written in Sanskrit, and were intended only for the learned. The uneducated populace, the vast majority of the people of India, was left contemptuously to its gods, its godlings, and its demons. To the Vedântist, existence was an evil, a thing to be got rid of, but which clung to a man's soul through endless transmigrations till he could obtain knowledge of the infinite impersonal deity. That knowledge obtained, and few there were who obtained it, the soul, released from the weary circle of existence, became absorbed in the Deity and lost its personality for ever. Râmânûja engrafted on this the idea of a personal God. Unlike those to whom it seemed "sweet to be wrecked on the Ocean of the Infinite," he taught of a Supreme

Deity, endowed with every possible gracious attribute, full of love and pity for the sinful beings who adore him, and granting the released soul a home of eternal bliss near him—a home where each soul never loses its identity, and whose state is one of perfect peace. In his infinite love and pity he has on occasions become incarnate in various forms for the salvation of mankind, and his fullest and most noble incarnation was that of the Great Example, Râma Chandra.

The teachers of this sect were necessarily Brâhmans, and the strictest rules regarding eating, bathing, and dressing were laid down by the founder. Nor were its members very popular in Northern India, its tenets being rather of a speculative than of a practical nature. About three hundred years later, late in the fourteenth century, we come upon Râmânanda, a prominent member of Râmânûja's school. He was a contemporary of John Huss, and of our John Wycliffe. He travelled much, especially in the south of India, where he drank anew from the spring of *bhakti* at its source, after which he returned to the residence of his superior, Râghavânanda. His brethren objected that, in the course of his peregrinations, it was impossible that he could have observed that privacy in his meals which is a vital observance of the Râmânûja sect; and, as Râghavânanda admitted the validity of the objection, Râmânanda was condemned to feed in a place apart from the rest of the disciples. He was highly incensed at this order, and retired from the society altogether, establishing a schism of his own.

I have mentioned this at some length, because the insult offered to Râmânanda was destined to result in one of the greatest religious revolutions which India has seen. Râmânanda gave his disciples a significant name—Avadhûta, or Liberated. They had 'shaken off' the narrow fetters imposed by Râmânûja on his followers, and all castes were equally admitted to fellowship. His twelve chief disciples included, besides Brâhmans, a Musalmân weaver, a leather-worker, a Râjput, a Jat, and a barber. He no longer preached to Brâhmans only, or in Sanskrit. "The common people heard him gladly," for he taught them in their own tongue, and the first great writers of Mediæval Hindôstân were his immediate disciples.

Each of these twelve apostles (note the number) founded a sect, each of which bears its master's name. By far the most important of them is that founded by the Musalmân Kabîr, the uneducated low-born weaver, and known as the sect of the Kabîrpanthis. Before going further I would ask those who have been to India to think of the marvellous attractions which Râmânanda's teaching must have presented. We often hear



of Hindus joining Islâm, and abandoning the faith of their fore-fathers, but who ever heard of a Musalmân turning a Hindu? The thing to us at the present day seems impossible. Yet here is the case of a Musalmân,—nay more, a Musalmân whose subsequent career showed that he was devoted to the doctrine of the unity of God,—deliberately joining, and being received by, a Hindu sect, and successfully preaching its dogmas.

One other word of explanation. I shall have to quote translations from these writers, in order to illustrate their teaching and opinions. Now there is nothing so suspicious as a translation. It will be easy for anyone to say, “O, that’s all very well; but the writer of the essay has unconsciously coloured the translations by his own opinions.” In order to guard against such criticism, which I at once admit would be perfectly fair, I propose, as far as possible, not to give my own translations, but to read those made by other people, who are beyond suspicion. Amongst these, the principal are the famous Horace Hayman Wilson, Mr. Growse, the translator of Tulasi Dâsi’s Râmâyana (I believe, a Roman Catholic), and Mr. Foss Westcott, an Indian Missionary, and the son of the revered Bishop, the author of the commentary on St. John’s Gospel.

Kabîr, as I have said, was a poor Musalmân weaver, who was attracted by the wideness of Râmânanda’s preaching, and became his disciple. His own preaching was not a repetition or imitation of his master’s, for his Moslem training led him to select what was truest and best in it, and to superimpose upon it the truest and best points of his early faith. At the present day there are about a million Kabîrpanthis in India, most of whom live in the upper part of the Ganges Valley and in Central India. They are everywhere respected. As Wilson says, “The quaker-like spirit of the sect, their abhorrence of all violence, their regard for truth, and the unobtrusiveness of their opinions, render them very inoffensive members of the state.” To them may be added two and a quarter millions of Punjab Sikhs, a name familiar to everyone here; for their religion is an offshoot of Kabîr’s.

With an unprecedented boldness Kabîr preached to the polytheistic Hindus unadulterated monotheism. He assailed the whole system of idol-worship, and ridiculed the learning and pretensions alike of the Hindu Pandits and of the Musalmân Mullas. To the one God, he gave the name of Râma, which he had learnt from his master, but to him Râma’s life on earth was of little importance. He worshipped Râma “The Creator of the world” not the Prince of Oudh. This God is personal, of ineffable purity and irresistible power. The *pure man*, that

is to say a true follower of Kabîr is "like him" and after death lives with him, as his equal. Man came from God, and must ultimately return to Him and be one with Him. But everything else also came from God, and so there is a universal brotherhood upon the earth. His followers have, as often occurs, exalted him above anything which he claimed for himself. They identify him with the Deity, and say that he has existed from all eternity and has often visited this world. There are apocryphal works of the sect, in which his conversations with Muhammad, and even with Moses, are recorded, both of whom are said to have accepted his teaching. His last incarnation, they say, was of virgin birth. He came, as on previous occasions, to wipe away the illusion, which hides the Creator from Mankind. It is impossible to deny that much of this has been borrowed, and is a distorted reflection of Christianity. It shows how possible it was for the more essential elements of his doctrines to be borrowed from it too.

His own moral code deserves a passing notice. To him, Life was the gift of God, and therefore may not be violated by His creatures. Humanity (both to men and animals) and Truth are the two cardinal virtues,—the latter because ignorance of God is due to illusion which is sprung from falsehood. Retirement and meditation are recommended, and (as in the case of the early Christians) implicit devotion in word, act, and thought to the spiritual guide or clergyman is insisted upon. This last is common to many Indian religions, but Kabîr had the strength of mind to put the idea on a logical footing. The pupil is enjoined to scrutinize his teacher's doctrines and acts before he resigns himself to his control, and in many texts Kabîr himself calls upon his disciples to test his sayings and his acts, and pleads for an attentive examination of the doctrine which he offers them. He teaches devotion, but the devotion may not be blind.

The stress laid upon the importance of absolute truthfulness is also noteworthy. Many Hindu writers praise and enjoin the practice of veracity, but it can hardly be called a national virtue,—nor, indeed, do they insist on it on all occasions. For instance Manu, the most esteemed lawgiver of all, while insisting on the necessity of speaking the truth, especially when on oath, specifically states that perjury is permissible to save a person being condemned to death, and adds that it is no deadly sin to take a light oath which one does not intend to keep, when it is made for the preservation of a Brâhman, or to get out of trouble for one's cattle trespassing, or in making a proposal for marriage, or in making love to a damsel. Kabîr

permits no paltering like this. Truth is truth, and a lie is a lie. The former is right, the latter is of illusion,—or as we should say, of the Devil.

Very strikingly Christian is Kabîr's doctrine of the Word. Let me give it you as Mr. Westcott heard it explained by a follower of the sect. In the beginning God alone existed, but from Him issued forth the Word. When God willed that creation should come into existence he gave command through the Word, *i.e.*, the Word was uttered, and thus through the Word were all things made that are made. Although the Word issued from God, it is not distinct from God, but remains with Him, as thought remains in the heart of man. God's voice goes forth that men may have a knowledge of the Word, and so the Word is in the World, and also with God. The Word dwells in every word spoken by man, and as it is there they can also dwell in God. The Word, in fact, exists in every audible sound,—in the voice of men, in the tick of the clock, in the sound of the drum, in the rustling of the trees and in the thunderclap.

All this is very mystical, but I think I can best explain it by saying that every sound, and every word that men speak has the Word itself at its basis. When the Word is obscured by illusion, the uttered words become false, and hence the necessity for cultivating truthfulness. Every lie is an offence against the Word, and hence against God. It is unnecessary for me to call your attention to the startling resemblance of all this to the teaching of St. John.

Another peculiarly christian idea adopted by the Kabîrpanthis is the sacramental meal. Whether this was instituted by Kabîr himself or was subsequently imitated from the Jesuit Missionaries at the Agra Court it is impossible to say. To me, the fact of the independent love-feast after the rite, seems to make it most probable that Kabîr himself got it from the Nestorians.

Every Sunday as well as the day of the full moon is observed as a day of fasting, and in the evening there is a solemn sacramental meal. The worshippers assemble, and the Mahant, or leading celebrant, reads a brief address, and then allows a short interval for prayer and meditation. All who feel themselves unworthy to proceed further then retire to a distance. Those who remain approach the senior celebrant in turn, and placing their hands together receive into the palm of the right hand, which is uppermost, a small consecrated wafer, and two other articles of consecrated food. They then approach another celebrant, who pours into the palm of the right hand



a few drops of water which they drink. This food and water is regarded as Kabîr's special gift, and it is said that all who receive it worthily will have eternal life. Part of the sacramental food is "reserved" and is carefully kept from pollution for administration to the sick and dying.

After the public sacrament there is a substantial meal which all attend, closely reminding one of the early Christian Love-feasts.

Very interesting is Kabîr's constant association of God with the idea of *life*. "From not knowing Râma," he cries, "the world has been swallowed up in death." Then again hear one of his calls to people about what was to him "the Bread of Life" :—

"Lay in your provender and provide your carriage; for, if your food fail and your feet be weary, your life is in the hands of another. Lay in your provender sufficient for the road, while the time yet serves; evening comes on; the day is flown, and naught will be provided. Now is the time to prepare. . . . How is it possible to reach the city (of salvation) when your guide cannot point out the road? When the master is blind, what becomes of the scholar? When the blind leads the blind, both will fall into the well."

Again. "I have wept for mankind, but no one has wept with me; *he* will join in my tears, who comprehends the Word. All have exclaimed, Master, Master, but to me this doubt arises; how can they sit down with the Master, whom they do not know?"

Kabîr was a voluminous author. He was not a great poet, like Tulasi Dâsa, but is famous for the shortness and pithiness of his sayings. Most of his works consist of collections of separate verses, each distinct in itself and connected with the others by the very slightest bond of context. As in the case of other famous teachers, tradition has given him an "Anti-Kabîr," in this case his own son Kamâl. Kamâl is said to have spent his time in inventing equally pithy couplets to refute his father's sayings. Thus one of Kabîr's best-known proverbial saws, equivalent to our expression about having two strings to one's bow, is :—

"Saith Kabîr, always get into two boats, for when one goes down, the other will be there for you."

It must be confessed that this is not a very good proverb, but it hardly justified his son in saying :—

"Saith Kamâl, never get into two boats or else you'll be split in two, and both will turn over."

Kabîr, as I have said drank not only at the fountain of semi-Christian Râma worship, but also at that of Islâm. When a reformer does this sort of thing, the usual effect is that both sides unite in abusing him. But that was not Kabîr's fate. In his case each claimed him as an adherent, and a pretty legend tells us that when he died a strife arose amidst his followers over his body. The Hindus declared he was a Hindu and wished to burn it, while the Musalmâns asserted that he was one of them, and that it must be buried. In the midst of their dispute Kabîr himself suddenly appeared amongst them, and desiring them to look under the cloth which covered his mortal remains, immediately vanished. On obeying his instructions they found nothing under the cloth but a heap of flowers. These were divided between the rival faiths, half being buried according to Musalmân rites, while the other half was wafted to the skies in the smoke of a Hindu funeral pyre.

In studying all these various oriental faiths, I always like to apply to them our Master's practical test, "by their fruits shall ye know them." Has the religion founded by Kabîr acted for the good of those who profess it? I do not hesitate to answer in the affirmative. I have already quoted to you Professor Wilson's verdict. Now let me quote to you what Mr. Foss Westcott, the Missionary, says:—

"In moral influence and grasp of sacramental truth the *Kabîrpanth* seems to me superior to all other Hindu religious organisations in this country (*i.e.*, in India). I have been much impressed with the good tone that seems to characterize its members. At the *Mâgh Mêla* their's was the only encampment in which one seemed to be conscious of a really religious atmosphere."

Kabîr was the direct pupil of Râmânanda, he was no poet, and he founded a sect which bears his name. The other reformer with whom I shall deal to-day, Tulasi Dâsa, lived a hundred and fifty years later, being seventh in descent, in succession of master and pupil, from Râmânanda; he was a great poet; and he founded no sect. We have seen that Kabîr paid little or no heed to the life of Râma on earth, all his faith was devoted to Râma the eternal, loving Creator. But Tulasi Dâsa was different. To him an incarnate God was as necessary a part of his system as it is of Christianity, and for this reason the mainspring of the faith which he taught has many more points of contact with our's than even Kabîr's.

Regarding the facts of his life we know but little. According to tradition he was born in 1532. He was a Brâhman, and he tells us that he was one of those unfortunate children, born

under an unlucky star, who was abandoned, as was customary in those days, by his parents. He was picked up by an itinerant *Sādhu*, who adopted him as his disciple, and gave him a moderate education. We know the names of his preceptor and of his immediate relations. He married and begat a son who met an early death, and after that, it is said at the instigation of his wife, he became a wandering Vaishnava. He commenced writing his great work, the *Râmâyana*, in the city of Oudh, when he was 43 years of age, and subsequently, owing to a difference with his co-religionists on a point of discipline, moved to Benares, where he finished it. He was attacked by plague in that city in the year 1623, and died the same year, though apparently not from the disease.

Some score of works are attributed to him, the most famous of which is the *Râmâyana*, or, to quote its full name, "The Lake of the Deeds of Râma."

I do not think that there can be any doubt as to its reputation being deserved. In its own country it is supreme over all other literature, and exercises an influence which it would be difficult to describe in exaggerated terms. As a work of art, it has, to European readers, its prolixities and episodes which grate against Occidental tastes, but I never met a person who has read it in the original who was not impressed by it as the work of a great genius.

I do not propose to give any specimens of it, for time would not allow me to do so, and, moreover, any extract would be like presenting a glass of water as a specimen of the ocean.<sup>1</sup> Its style varies with the subject. There is the infinite pathos of the passage describing Râma's farewell to his mother, the rugged language describing the horrors of the battlefield, and, when occasion requires it, a sententious, aphoristic method of dealing with the narrative, which teems with similes drawn, not from the traditions of the schools, but from nature herself. His characters, too, live and move with all the dignity of a heroic age. They are not colourless phantoms which he clothes with beautiful imagery, but are real beings each with his well-defined personality. Râma, perhaps too perfect to enlist all our sympathies; his brothers, the impetuous and loving Lakshmana and the tender, constant Bharata; Sita, the ideal of an Indian wife and mother; the demon Râvana, destined to failure, and fighting with all his demon force against his fate,—all these are characters as lifelike and distinct as any in Occidental literature. It would be a great mistake to look upon Tulasi

<sup>1</sup> In the Appendix I give a translation of an often quoted specimen of his narrative style.



Dâsa as merely an ascetic. He was a man that had lived. He had been a householder (a word of much meaning to an Indian), and had known the pleasures of a wedded life, the joy of clasping an infant son to his bosom, and the sorrow of losing that son ere he had attained his prime. He appealed, not to scholars, but to his native countrymen as a whole—the people that he knew. He had mixed with them, begged from them, prayed with them, taught them, experienced their pleasures and their yearnings. And then there was the great modesty of the man. He never wrote a line in which he did not himself believe heart and soul. He was full of his theme, the glory and love of his master, and so immeasurable did that glory and that love seem that he counted himself as but dust before them. “My intellect,” he says, “is beggarly, while my ambition is imperial. May good people all pardon my presumption and listen to my childish babbling, as a father and mother delight to hear the lisping prattle of their little one.” Kâlidâsa, who is commonly counted as the greatest poet of Sanskrit times, took the tale of Râma as a peg on which to hang his garlands of graceful verses, but Tulasi Dâsa wove wreaths of imperishable fragrance and humbly laid them at the feet of the God whom he adored. No wonder that such a man, who was at the same time a great poet and an enthusiastic reformer, at once sane and clean, was taken for their own by the multitude who lived under the sway of nature and in daily contact with her secrets, with flowers and trees, with beasts and birds, with hunger and with thirst. “Here,” cried they, “is a great soul that knows us. Let us take him for our guide.”

His other works are also delightful reading. Here is a pretty picture from one which may be called the “Gospel of the Infant Râma.”

“Full of happiness the mother caresses her little darling. She lets him cling to her fingers as she teaches him to walk in the fair courtyard of the palace. *Runu jhunu, runu jhunu*, sweetly tinkles the bell-girdle on his waist, sweetly tinkle the anklet-bells on his feet, as she helps him along. . . . His bonny face is a picture, with two little teeth peeping out behind his dawn-rosy lips, and stealing away the hearts of all. . . . His bright eyes, henna-darkened, put to shame the glancing silver-fish. . . . As he hears his mother snap her fingers, he crows and springs with delight, and anon he fills her with dismay when he lets her finger go. He tumbles down and pulls himself up upon his knees, and babbles with joy to his brothers when his mother shows him a piece of cake: and she, as she looks at his pretty baby ways, is drowned in love, and

cannot bear her happiness. . . . Saith Tulasi Dâsa, the man that loveth not this sweetness, hath no soul, and his life in this world is in vain.”

In another work, which dwells more on the heroic side of the legend,—of the fighting with the demon and his conquest,—there is some marvellous word painting, the sound, in the original, being literally an echo of the sense. The account of the burning of Râvana’s city, Lanka, is remarkably vivid in its descriptive power. We hear the crackling of the flames, the shouts of the citizens, and the cries of the helpless women as they call for water. This is one of his verses:—

“‘Fire! Fire! Fire!’ They flee, they run hither and thither for their lives. Mother knows not her own daughter. Father helps not his son. Girls, with their hair dishevelled, nay, their very garments torn open, blind in the darkness, children, old men, cry and cry again and again for ‘water, water.’ The horses neigh, the elephants trumpet as they break from their stalls. In the vast mob, men shove and trample, one crushing the other as he falls beneath his feet. Calling each other’s names, children shriek, lamenting distraught, crying, ‘My father, my father, I am being scorched, I am being burnt alive in the flames.’”

The *Vinaya Pattrika*, or Petition, is an altogether different work. Here the poet is a suppliant. An interesting legend tells how it came to be written. One day a homicide reached Benares on a pilgrimage of remorse, crying, “For the love of the Lord Râma, give alms to me, a homicide.” Tulasi, hearing the well-beloved Name, called him to his house, gave him sacred food that had been offered to the God, declared him purified, and sang praises to his adored deity. The Brâhmans of Benares held an assembly, and sent for the poet, asking how this homicide’s sin was absolved, and why he had eaten with him. Tulasi replied, “Read ye your Scriptures. Their truth hath not entered yet into your hearts. Your intellects are not yet ripe, and they remove not the darkness from your souls.” They replied that they knew the power of the Name, as recorded in the Scriptures; “but this man,” said they, “is a homicide, what salvation can there be for him?” Tulasi asked them to mention some proof by which he might convince them, and they at length agreed that if the sacred bull of Shiva would eat from the homicide’s hand, they would confess that they were wrong and that Tulasi Dâsa was right. The man was taken to the temple, and the bull at once ate out of his hand. Thus did Tulasi teach that the repentance of even the greatest sinner is accepted by the Lord. This miracle had the

effect of converting thousands of men and making them lead holy lives. The result enraged the Kaliyuga (the Hindu equivalent of the Devil of Christianity), who came to the poet and threatened him, saying, "Thou hast become a stumbling-block in my kingdom of wickedness. I will straightway devour thee, unless thou promise to stop this increase of piety." Full of terror, Tulasi confided all this to Hanumân, Râma's faithful attendant, who appeared to him in a dream. Hanumân consoled him, telling him he was blameless, and advising him to become a complainant in the court of the Lord himself. "Write," said he, "a *Vinaya Pattrika*, a petition of complaint, and I will get an order passed upon it by the master, and will be empowered to punish the Kaliyuga. Without such an order I cannot do so, for he is the King of the present age." According to this advice Tulasi wrote the *Vinaya Pattrika*.

In my former lecture I gave a long quotation from the burning words of the poet in this, and I shall not take up time by repeating it here. I may say that to me it appears that in this work he rose to his most sublime heights of prayer and praise, and most nearly approached our Christian ideas of the loving fatherhood of God. "Although," cries he, "even my words are foul and false, yet, O Lord, dost thou let thy Tulasi cling to thee in the close kinship of a perfect love."

Tulasi Dâsa founded no sect, no *church*. We never hear of a Tulasi-dâsi, as we hear of a Kabîr-panthi, or of a member of the Arya or Brahma Samâj. A man might belong to any Hindu sect and yet follow his teaching. He accepted all the ordinary Hindu theology, with its entire mythological machinery. But, to him, all these were so many accidents beside the great truths, borrowed from Nestorian Christianity, on which he laid stress, viz.:—That there is one Supreme Being. That Man is by nature infinitely sinful and unworthy of salvation. That nevertheless, the Supreme Being, in His infinite mercy, became incarnate in the person of Râma to relieve the world of sin. That this Râma has returned to heaven, where we have now a God who is not only infinitely merciful but knows by actual experience how great are man's infirmities and temptations, and who, though himself incapable of sin, is ever ready to extend his help to the sinful human being that calls upon him. On all this follows, not independently but as a corollary, the duty which is owed to one's neighbour, and the doctrine of the universal brotherhood of man.

What relationship do the other deities of Hinduism bear to Râma in Tulasi Dâsa's theology? The answer is difficult. I think that we may compare them all (even Shiva and Pârvati)



to the position which Angels and Saints occupy in the Roman Catholic Church. Some of them have mighty powers, but all are subordinate to Râma. Of special interest is the position taken by Hanumân. He is invariably represented as being, in heaven, Râma's personal attendant, and in connection with this I may mention one really beautiful legend which, though not recorded by Tulasi Dâsa himself, is still directly traceable to his influence. There was a man, the vilest of scavengers, suffering from a loathsome disease, and lying in a foul and filthy place. In his pain he cried out "Ah Râma, Ah Râma." Hanumân happened to be flying by at the time, and, indignant at hearing his Master's name uttered in such disgusting surroundings, he kicked the man on the breast. That night when, according to his custom, he was shampooing Râma's body he found a dreadful wound upon the deity's breast. Horror-stricken, Hanumân asked how it happened. "You kicked a poor man on the breast while he was calling upon my name. And what you did to even the vilest of my children, you did unto me."

Over the whole of the Gangetic valley, and even far beyond, Tulasi Dâsa's Râmâyana is better known than the Bible is in England. It is, in fact, the Bible of 90 millions of Hindus. And the practical result of the general adoption of his religious attitude has been of the greatest importance to Northern India. Through his teaching the people of Hindôstân acknowledge the rule, not of a relentless fate, but of a God who knows and loves each one of his worshippers. Take a well-known proverb: *Jisi vidhi râkhê Râm, usi vidhi rahanâ bhaiyâ*. Literally translated this is, "Brother, remain thou in the station in which Râma hath placed thee." It is usually, and quite properly, taken to mean that a man should remain content in that state of life unto which it hath pleased God to call him. So it does, but to a Hindu of Upper India it means far more. To him, it is not Fate, it is not Brahma, Vishnu, or Shiva, not any of the numerous godlings who surround his village and his home, who has placed him where he is. It is Râma, Râma the loving, Râma the compassionate, Râma who was once a man, Râma who knows him personally and who listens to his appeals. All this is conveyed to him by that one name. And so he really is content, and knows that all is for the best.

I have already given a few specimens of Tulasi Dâsa's poetic style, and I would ask to be allowed to give one more, a translation of the short poem which he wrote on the death of his friend Tôdar Mall, the Emperor Akbar's famous minister. The opening lines are curiously like Sir Henry Wotton's "Lord of himself, though not of lands,"

“Lord of but four small villages, yet a mighty monarch,—for he ruled himself; in this age of evil hath the sun of Tôdar set.

“The burden of Râma’s love, great though it was, he bare unto the end; but too heavy for him was the burden of this world, and so he laid it down.

“My heart is like a pure fount in the garden of Tôdar’s virtues; and when I think thereon, it overfloweth, and tears well forth from mine eyes.

“Tôdar hath gone to the dwelling-place of his Lord, and so, my soul, refrain thyself; but sore are the memories awakened by that pure word ‘friend.’”

On occasions like this it is usual to conclude with a moral. What moral can we draw to-day? There is one lesson which mankind seems unable to learn, and which History, repeating itself, has hammered on the anvil of time with ever untiring clang. The three great reformers whom we have just considered found Hinduism dead, and its scriptures in Sanskrit,—a dead language. They gave India a living religion because they abandoned Sanskrit and taught in the vernacular. No religion in the world has ever had any living moving force among the people, once it has lost touch with that people’s language. In the dim mists of the past,—in the ages when Amraphel King of Shinar was codifying the laws of Babylon, when the Syrian ready to die was journeying with his flocks across the desert to Canaan, when Israel was a sojourner in the land of Ham,—a tribe of Aryans gradually filtered into India and peopled the Punjab. They were joyful, lusty northmen, with a joyful, lusty religion of nature-worship, enshrined in hymns that still strike responsive chords in our hearts four thousand years after they were composed. Their language became obsolete, though their hymns remained the Hindu scriptures, and the masses of Aryan India sank into bloody fetishism and slavish superstition, for they no longer understood their sacred books, while the learned made on their side a fetish of a barren philosophy. Then came the king’s son who had mastered all this philosophy and who had gauged its emptiness. An awakened Buddha, he founded his new religion, and a new literature, which conquered India, for it was in no dead language, but was in the people’s tongue. As centuries passed, this literature too became dead and ceased to be a Scripture profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction,

for instruction in righteousness. A century and a half after the Buddha, Ezra fixed the text of the law of Moses, and thereafter its very letters became sacred, and not one jot or one tittle could be altered. That Hebrew too became dead, and was understood only by the scribes and doctors, who held that "this people that knoweth not the law are cursed." With the language, Judaism became a dead formality till the Son of the Carpenter of Nazareth,—a man who knew his Hebrew, and who could read Isaiah,—brought the gospel of Love and gave it to the people in their vernacular, so that the common people heard Him gladly. Our Christian Scriptures would have suffered the same inevitable fate had not Jerome, four hundred years later, translated them into Latin, the vulgar tongue, and created the Vulgate. It served its turn and then came the dark ages, when Latin was unknown, when the doctors of our religion spent their days in elaborating casuistry or in discussing how many angels could stand on the point of a needle—when few there were who did justly and loved mercy and walked humbly with their God,—when Christianity had ceased to hold Europe except with a nominal allegiance; till Luther translated the Bible into German, once more regained for her her empire, and sent her forth to conquer other worlds in the name of his Master.

In India, too, Buddha's message of brotherly love was lost. His Scriptures in a language which had ceased to live could no longer contend with its rival, Hinduism, and the land brooded through centuries of darkness, darkness that was all the darker because it followed one of God's twilights,—a darkness like that of Egypt which could be felt, and which one feels even now as one wanders through the subtleties and through the grossness of the literature of those days,—until God, in his unspeakable wisdom, just as the land was becoming divided between absolute atheism and horrible demon worship, saw fit to use the corrupt Christianity of Southern India as a means for spreading some of His truth over a heathen land. The great trio, Râmânanda, Kabîr, and Tulasi Dâsa were given a message to deliver. They gave it forth,—often haltingly,—often distorted,—often absolutely falsely,—but they gave it, and in what they gave there was much that was Christian, much that was true, and much that was beautiful. They gave it in a language "understood of the people," and the religion is still a living one, for the language is still understood.

It is to prophets like Tulasi Dâsa that Gwatkin's words<sup>1</sup> are peculiarly applicable. "The kingdom of heaven is wider and

<sup>1</sup> *The Eye for Spiritual Things*, pp. 256 and 10.



older than any church, wider than all the churches put together. It is as wide and as old as the world, for his kingdom ruleth over all. The ground was preparing through unmeasured ages, the seed was sown when the first man became a living soul, and the harvest shall not be fully gathered in till there is no more death. The kingdom stands for God's guiding of all men in all ages before and after Christ: and nothing less can be the meaning of that Catholic Church which we confess to be one. There is no true unity except in Christ; yet everyone on the face of the earth who does a work of love is so far one in Christ with us, even though he had never heard Christ's name; for Christ's grace is with him." And again, "Faith is not a peculiar mystery of Christian orthodoxy. There is true faith according to its kind in every work that is done on the face of the wide earth for the sake of love and duty, back to the Three Hundred in the pass, and down to the child in the slums who shares his last coppers with one who needs them more than he. In every nation he has faith who feareth God and worketh righteousness, for he is accepted with him. And the man that walketh in darkness and hath no light—if only he walks uprightly and judges righteous judgment, he too shall see the mystery of the truth and duty that he loved unfolded in the loving face of him that liveth and was dead, and is alive for evermore."

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## APPENDIX.

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I here give a translation of the well-known passage of the *Rāmāyana* (*Kishkindhya kānda*, 14 ff.) in which Tulasi Dâsa describes the passing away of the rainy season. It is a specimen of only one of the poet's many styles. There is an antithetic balancing of sentences which recalls the book of Proverbs. For instance, Tulasi Dâsa's "As the sheet lightning flickereth, so is the short-lived love of the wicked," is built on the same principle as proverbs like "As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools." The translation has appeared in India, but it is not likely to have been seen in this country. The speaker is Râma, who is waiting for the rains to cease in order that he may continue his search for Sita.

"The sky, covered with arrogant rain-clouds, fiercely roareth, while my heart is distraught, bereft of its darling. The sheet lightning flickereth amidst the heavy clouds, fitful as the short-lived love of the wicked. The heavy vapours pour forth rain, and hang close to the earth, like a wise man

stooping 'neath his weight of wisdom. The mountains bear the never-ceasing assaults of the raindrops, standing proudly unconcerned; and even so the holy man heedeth not the words of the wicked. Each shallow streamlet, flooded to the brim, hasteneth eagerly on its way, like a vain fellow puffed up with a little wealth. The clear water which falleth on the earth is become mud (and hideth it from the sky), as the cares of this world envelop the soul (and hide it from the Creator). With here a drop and there a rill, the water filleth the lakes, like virtue entering a good man's heart; while the rushing rivers flow into the Ocean and find rest, even as the soul findeth rest in faith in God.

“The grass groweth green and thick upon the ground, hiding the very paths so that they cannot be traced out; and even so the disputations of the unbelievers ever hide the true path of the scriptures.

“The frogs shout lustily around us, like a school of Brâhman postulants reading holy books. Fresh shoots appear on bushes, as wisdom springeth in the hearts of the pious; and only the *arka* and *jawâs* trees lose their green leaves from the rainfall, as the schemes of the wicked fail under a righteous governor. Seek where thou wilt, thou wilt find no dust; so when a man yieldeth to passion his piety departeth. Fair shineth the earth, prosperous with its fields of corn, fair as a charitable man blessed by prosperity; but in the dark nights the countless fireflies are radiant, like unto hypocrites that have met their meet companion (the night of ignorance). The field banks (left uncared for) are burst and washed away by the heavy rainstorms, as a woman is ruined by being left to her own devices; but the wise and clever husbandman weedeth his crops, as the wise man weedeth his heart of delusion, passion, and pride. The Brâhmanî goose hath hidden itself, even as piety disappeareth in this age of sin; and as on the salt tracts, for all the rain, not a blade of grass is seen, so lust is born not in the heart of a servant of the Lord. The earth is brilliant with swarms of manifold living creatures; so, under a good governor, do his subjects multiply. Here and there a wearied traveller sitteth to rest himself, as a man's senses rest when wisdom is born in him.

“At times a mighty wind ariseth and hither and thither scattereth the clouds, as, with the birth of a disobedient son, a household's piety is destroyed. At one time, by day, there is a thick darkness, at another time the sun is visible; even so, true knowledge is destroyed or born, as a man consorteth with the vile or with the holy.

“The rains are past, the Autumn-time is come; O Lakshmana, see how fair the world appeareth. (The first sign that it cometh) is the white-bearded blossom of the tall thatch-grass, which hideth the earth as though declaring that the old age of the rains had come. Canopus shineth in the heavens, and the water which drowned the pathways is drying up, as desire drieth up when the True Content is achieved. The water glisteneth clear in the streams and lakes, like a holy man’s heart from which passion and delusion have departed. Gently minisheth the depth of the streams and lakes, as the wise man gradually loseth his thoughts of self. The wagtail knoweth that the Autumn is arrived, and cometh forth from its hiding-place, beautiful as a good work done in season. No mud is there, and yet no dust, fair shineth the world, yea, like unto the deeds of a lore-learned king: yet as the waters fall the fish are troubled, as a foolish spendthrift is perplexed when his possessions are wasted. The sky, serene and pure, without a cloud, is like unto a servant of the Lord, who is free from all earthly desire; while now and then there fall a few drops of Autumn rain—few as the few who place their faith in me.<sup>1</sup>

“Joyfully issue forth from the cities, kings and eremites, merchants and beggars, even as the four orders of mankind desert all care when they find faith in the Lord.

“Happy are the fish where the water is deep; and happy is he who findeth naught between him and the fathomless mercy of the Lord. The lotuses bloom, and the lakes take from them a charm, as the pure Spirit becometh lovely when it taketh material form. The noisy bees hum busily, and birds of many kinds sing tuneful notes. The Brâhmanî goose alone is mournful when it seeth the night approach (which separateth it from its mate), as the evil man mourneth when he seeth the prosperity of another. The *châtaka* waileth in its ever waxing thirst, even as an enemy of the deity never findeth peace. The moon by night consoleth for the heat of the Autumn sun, as sin vanisheth at the sight of a holy man. The partridge-coveys gaze intent upon the moon, like pious men whose only thought is for the Lord. The gnat and the gadfly disappear in fear of Winter, as surely as a house is destroyed which persecuteth Brâhmins.

“The swarms of living creatures with which, in the rainy season, the earth was fulfilled, are gone. When they found the Autumn approaching, they departed. So, when a man findeth a holy spiritual guide, all doubts and errors vanish.”

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<sup>1</sup> Râma was, of course, an incarnation of the Lord.













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